

Sunday, August 29, marks the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina striking the Gulf Coast. More than 1,800 individuals lost their lives and millions of people saw their existences up-ended by this storm. We, the American people, should take this opportunity to reflect on the worst natural disaster in American history, to remember those who lost their lives, and extend our sympathy to those who lost loved ones and their homes. At the same time, we need to express our continued commitment to rebuilding the Gulf Coast and to helping the thousands there who are still in need.

Though the hurricane itself was a natural phenomenon, much of the resulting damage was a consequence of the failure of man and government. The immediate response of the Bush Administration to Katrina was marked by incompetence and cronyism. Furthermore, over the following year and a half, the GOP-controlled 109<sup>th</sup> Congress failed to provide much of the critically-needed relief for Gulf Coast residents.

Since Democrats gained the majority, Congress has taken many steps to setting right these wrongs. For example: we've cut through bureaucratic red tape and expedited gridlocked Gulf Coast projects by implementing new processes to streamline and resolve disputes; made continued progress on levee improvements; repaired more than 220 miles of levees and floodwalls, which have been repaired and restored to pre-Katrina levels of protection; made progress in moving Gulf Coast residents who had still been in temporary housing into long-term housing; provided \$40 million in grants to bring 944 medical professionals to New Orleans for at least three years to address the shortage of medical professionals; provided \$7 million in grants to fund community health centers in New Orleans that serve more than 50,000 people; and provided more than \$130 million in grants to renew damaged and displaced local criminal justice systems ravaged by Hurricane Katrina.

While we've made a lot of progress, there is still real work that needs to be done in New Orleans. Thousands of homes remain in ruins. I, along with this Congress, am dedicated to making sure that this great American city is rebuilt and this kind of preventable tragedy does not happen again.

The difficulties that the individual victims of Katrina had to endure -- the destruction of one's home, the loss of loved ones, being forced to abandon the city in which you and your family were raised -- are absolutely some of the worst things that can happen to a person. But Katrina also allowed some of man's best virtues to emerge: the bravery and determination of the citizens of New Orleans, the courage of responders, and the charity and compassion from

uniting around a common shock and subsequent outrage. It's unfortunately a long and difficult road ahead, but I know that with those virtues, the people of New Orleans and the citizens of the United States will prevail.